REPRESENTATION OF BEAUTY ON INDONESIAN TEENAGERS' TELEVISION DRAMA SERIES

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Abstract
This study explores ideal beauty concept represented in the teenagers' television drama series in Indonesia. Analyzing the female characters of drama series that were broadcast in 2010-201 as a pilot study, this research finds that certain body images dominate the television screens: majority of actors are thin, young, have fair skin and long hair. Most of them are portrayed as super feminin girls. Actors with Western Indonesian features are consisted of majority of drama population, followed by Eastern Asian and Caucasian, while the Eastern Indonesians are underservised. Brain is not a prominent feature, but kindness is highly appreciated. This study tried to develop a framework for analyzing teenagers' television drama that can be applied to a larger sample of programs or other television genre.
Keywords: beauty ideal, body image, content analysis, gender

INTRODUCTION

Children and young people constitute 30% of the 237 million inhabitants of Indonesia. Considered children and young people as potential "buyer", abundant amount of television programs are targeted at them. According to Hendriyani, Hollander, d'Haenens, and Beentjes (2011), the average supply of children's television in the 2000s amounted to 137.7 hours per week, broadcast by 10 national commercial television stations and one public television station. The number increased from an average duration of 6.8 hours per week in the 1970s, over 6.6 hours a week in the 1980s, to 34.6 hours per week in the 1990s.

The study presented below investigates how beauty represented in television programs directed at young people in Indonesia.

The idea that television's message patterns reflect underlying cultural values in society started with the Cultural Indicators project, one of the milestones in communication research in the US (Shanahan, 2004, p. 277). This message-system analysis research has inspired numerous researchers throughout the world to find out what kind of cultural socialization television conveys to its audiences (e.g., Gerbner, Gross, Jackson-

Beeck, Jeffries-Fox, & Signorielli, 1978; Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, & Morgan, 1980; Emons, 2011), including the concept of beauty ideal (see Engeln-Maddox, 2006; Northup & Liebler, 2010). Most of this research focused on television drama, as stated by Gerbner et al. (1978, p. 178), "*Television drama is the heart of that process because it offers the most diverse audiences a common and stable pattern of 'facts' about life and the world*". Northup and Liebler (2010) in their content analysis on young people's serial in the Disney Channel and Nickelodeon found that the characters in the serial bring a message of what constitute beauty and good, usually in the form of a slender figure, fair complexion, and young.

Aims, Scope and Theoretical Framework

This article seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How is the concept of ideal body image projected by the characters in the teenagers' television programs?
2. How does gender influence the concept of ideal body image?

This research focuses on longitudinal, fictional, narrative with storyline or drama, locally produced programs (i.e., serials or soap operas); other genres of programs are excluded. In terms of program production, the TV industry in Indonesia divides young audiences into three groups to cater for:

those who wear red-white, blue-white, and grey-white uniforms, referring to the colors of the school uniforms used in Indonesia: red-white for elementary school (age 5-11), blue-white for junior high school (age 12-14), and grey-white for senior high school (age 15-17). Teen's television programs in this study are referred to the second and third categories, age 12-17.

There are four dimensions of message system analysis: existence, priorities, values, and relationships. The assumption about existence deals with the question 'What is?', priorities refer to 'What is important?', values question 'What is right or wrong, good or bad?', while relationships figure out 'What is related to what, and how?' (Gerbner, 1970, p. 72-73). This research focuses on the first dimension, *existence*, exploring what is available (referred to) in public message systems at all, how frequently, and in what proportions. Gerbner stressed that "a mass-produced message system is the result of institutional processes selecting some things to be brought to public attention and ignoring or rejecting others" (p. 73). Measuring 'existence' means measuring the attention paid by an (television) institution to the presence and distribution of subjects, topics, and themes. Message system analysis is applied in numerous studies regarding various social-cultural themes, such as religion, family, gender, violence,

ethnic minorities, and sexuality (see, for examples, Shanahan, 2004; Engeln-Maddox, 2006; Koeman, Peters, & d'Haenens, 2007; Northup & Liebler, 2010 Emons, 2011).

The main concept that will be explored further in this study is body image. Figuero (2003) described body image as a person's mental picture of his/her body. This perception is influenced by beliefs, attitudes, and opinion of public. The concept of body image is closely related to the concept of beauty ideal. Beauty ideal can be described as the overall look, a combination of physical characteristics with a variety of products and activities (see Northup & Liebler, 2010; English, Solomon, & Asmore, 1994). Body image is the mental picture that we have because of the influence of society, whereas the beauty ideal is representing the desired views of the community (Northup & Liebler, 2010).

METHOD

In this study, systematic-quantitative content analysis was adopted. Purposive sampling was used, including popular teens' drama programs that were broadcast in 2010-2011: *Cinta Cenat Cenut, Go Go Girls, Nada Cinta,* and *Arti Sahabat.* Two of the serials, *Nada Cinta* and *Cinta Cenat Cenut*, were in the top ten list of programs with highest rating among young people according to Nielsen Company (period July

2010-July 2011). From each programs, we took six episodes from the first 12 episodes. Television stations usually evaluate a serial after 12 episodes. When the rating and share of the serial are good, the station continues to broadcast the program.

We looked into 24 episodes in total. The main character, supporting character, and figurant were coded for each episode. In total, 386 characters were coded in this study.

The Coding Instrument

Inspired by Northup and Liebler's study (2010), we use several of their instruments. *Character frequency* is divided into three categories: main actor, supporting actor, and figurant. The main characters are the principal carriers of the storylines. The supporting characters have more passive roles than the main ones. Characters that shown once or twice in the serial and do not influence the storylines are considered as figurants.

Social age refers to the age of actor in the story. It is measured by categorize each character into age range: 0-9; 10-14 (grade 4 elementary school – junior high school); 15-18 (senior high school); 19-22 (college/university); 23-29 (working); 30-55 (parents); and 56 (grandparents).

To measure **body image**, we use several variables. *Body size* is measured by

categorize each character into three groups: below average, average, and above average. *Race/Ethnicity* was derived from the physical appearance: the character looks like Western Indonesian - light brown skin, straight/wavy black hair; Eastern Indonesian - dark brown skin, curly hair; Caucasian - fair skin, non-black hair; East Asian - looks like Chinese, Japanese or Korean.

Beauty ideal is classify based on categories used by Northup & Liebler (2010): *Classic Beauty/feminine* (long hair, gentle gesture, fashionable but not glamour); *Trendy* (preoccupied with appearance, glamour, popular (the 'ditz' of the group), obsessed with boys); *Athletic* (short hair, into sport, sporty dress, more interested in sports than boys or fashion); *Brainy* (looks smart, usually wearing eye glasses, the person everyone in the groups turn for answers to just about any sort of question); *The girl next door* (between feminine dan athletic, unaware of her beauty, draw attraction of boys, looks natural, simple but still fashionable); *Alternative* (strange or unusual look, often bullies by the other girls).

The concept of beauty ideal is only applied for girls in the serial, age 10-18 years old. *Physical features*: hair, clothes, eye glasses. *Non physical features*: smart, popular, kind, arrogant, helpless.

DISCUSSION

We look into 386 characters in total, 50% of them (n = 193) are female and the other half are male. About 23% of female characters are main characters in the serial and 25% of the male characters are the main actors (see Table 1). The proportion of supporting actors and figurants among female and male characters is similar; there is no significantly different of the character frequency between male and female actors.

Table 1. Comparing age based on Characters' Gender

Variable	Values	Female		Male		Test of difference
		f	%	f	%	
Character frequency	Main actor	45	23	49	25	
	Supporting actor	104	54	108	56	
	Figurant	44	23	36	19	Not sig
Social age (as appeared on TV)	0-9	5	3	0	0	
	15-18	119	62	102	53	
	19-22	2	1	8	4	Fis 16.203; p = 0.008
	23-29	10	5	25	13	
	30-55	53	27	54	28	
	56-above	4	2	4	2	
The real age of the character	younger than what appeared on TV	22	12	7	4	Fis 98.669; p = 0.000
	older than what appeared on TV	62	32	4	2	
	About the same	107	56	151	94	
Race/ethnicity	Caucasian	29	15	28	15	
	Western Indonesian	111	58	79	41	
	Eastern Indonesian	4	2	0	0	Fis 19.273; p = 0.000
	East Asian	42	22	73	38	
	Middle East	7	4	13	7	

Table 1 shows that, as expected, most of the characters are teenager 15-18 years old. There is a significantly different in distribution of social age among male and female actors (Fisher's exact = 16.203; p = 0.008). For female, 62% of them are teenager and 27% are between 30-55 years old; most probably act as parents in the serial. For male actor, 53% of them are teenager, 28% are 30-55 years old, and 13% are between 23-29 years old –in the group of young adult. In other words, the social age distribution among male actors is more vary than female actors. There is no preteen representation among female and male actors in the teenagers' television drama series.

One of the complain television serial audiences often said is that the actors look older than their actual age. We check this statement by comparing the actual age of the actor (estimated by our coders based on what they read or hear from other media) with the social age of the actor. Among female actors, 12% of them are actually younger than their social age as appeared on television; 32% of them are actually older than their character's age on television; and only 56% that have about the same age between actual and social age. This phenomenon does not happen to male

actors. There are 94% of the male actors who have social age accordingly their actual age, only 4% are younger than their social age and 2% are older than their social age. Thus, female actors have to act out their social age more than male actors (Fischer's exact = 98.669, significant at p = 0.000).

There is imbalance representation of ethnicity in teenagers' television drama serial. Majority of female actors (58%) have Western Indonesian physical appearance such as light brown skin and straight/wavy black hair, 22% of the female actor have East Asian appearance (look like Korean, Chinese, or Japanese), 15% have Caucasian appearance, 4% have Middle East appearance (look like Arabic), and only 2% have Eastern Indonesian physical appearance. Among male actors, 41% of them have Western Indonesian appearance, 38% have East Asian appearance, 15% have Caucasian appearance, and 7% have Middle East appearance. There is no representation of Eastern Indonesian ethnics among male actors. The representation of ethnicity among male and female actors is significantly different (Fisher's exact = 19.273; p = 0.000).

Table 2. Body Image and Gender of the Characters

Variable	Values	Female		Male		Test of difference
		f	%	f	%	
Body size	Below average	173	90	89	46	Fis 96.286; p = 0.000
	Average	13	7	92	48	
	Above average	7	4	12	6	
Physical feature: Hair	Long	156	87			
	Short	15	8			
	Really short like a boy	9	5			
Clothes	fashionable but not glamour	83	43			
	fashionable glamour	43	22			
	Sporty	8	4			
	Simple	59	31			
Wearing eye glasses	No	170	89			
	Yes	22	11			
Popularity	Very popular	62	53	87	78	
	Not notice by friends	22	19	4	4	Fis 22.166; p = 0.000
	Liked by friends	29	25	21	19	
	pushed/avoided by friends	4	3			
Smart	No	17	31	16	23	Not sig
	Yes	38	69	54	77	
Kind/helpful	No	82	45	68	40	Not sig
	Yes	99	55	101	60	

Arrogant/Bitchy	No	87	47	129	70	Chi 20.567; df=1; p=0.000
	Yes	100	53	56	30	
Helpless	No	134	77	150	94	Chi 17.584; df=1; p = 0.000
	Yes	39	23	10	6	
Beauty ideal	Classic/feminine	34	27			
	Trendy	60	47			
	Athletic	3	2			
	The girl next door	31	24			

Beauty Image in The Television Screens

Thinness is showed mostly among females compare to males (Fisher's exact = 96.286; p = 0.000). Majority of the female characters (90%) have below average body size, while only 46% of male characters have below average body size; 48% of male characters have average body size (see Table 2).

Certain physical features stand out in the teenagers' television drama series, especially for female characters. Most of them (87%) have long hair. Regarding clothes that they wear, 43% of them wear fashionable clothes but not glamour looking and 31% wear simple clothes, while 22% wear glamour clothes (to emphasize that the characters are rich and or popular), and only 4% wear sporty style of clothes. Almost of the females characters (89%) do not wear any eye glasses that identical with "geek" image.

For non physical characters, we also compare the features between male and female actors. Only 53% of female characters are described as popular characters among their friends, while 78%

of male actors are described that way (Fisher's exact = 22.166; p = 0.000). About their intellectual capacity, there is no significant different between male and female characters. Most of female characters (69%) and male characters (77%) are described as smart people. A little bit more than half female characters (55%) and male characters (60%) are featured as very kind/helpful people. More female (53%) than male (30%) characters are described as bitchy/arrogant characters (Chi 20.567; df = 1; p = 0.000). On the other hand, more female (23%) than male (6%) characters are portrayed as helpless characters, always count on someone else to solve their problems (Chi 17.584; df = 1; p = 0.000).

We also find out how beauty ideal is constructed by the female characters 10-18 years old. Most of the characters are portrayed as someone *trendy* (preoccupied with appearance, glamour, popular, and or obsessed with boys), followed by *Classic Beauty/feminine* (long hair, gentle gesture, fashionable but not glamour) (27%); *the girl next door* (between feminine and

athletic, unaware of her beauty, draw attraction of boys, looks natural, simple but still fashionable) (24%), and only 2% are *Athletic* (short hair, into sport, sporty dress, more interested in sports than boys or fashion). None of the characters is portrayed as *Brainy* (looks smart, usually wearing eye glasses, the person everyone in the groups turn for answers to just about any sort of question) or *Alternative* (strange or unusual look, often bullies by the other girls).

When we look further, we found that most of the the Girl next door type (89%) are portrayed by main female actors, while most of the Trendy type of beauty (89%) are portrayed by supporting female actors. The different of beauty ideal between main actors and supporting actors is significant (Fisher's exact = 57.181; p = 0.000).

Table 3. Beauty Ideal and Character Frequency

| | | Character frequency | |
		Main actor f (%)	Supporting actor f (%)
Beauty ideal	Classic/feminine	8 (29%)	20 (71%)
	Trendy	6 (12%)	43 (88%)
	The girl next door	25 (89%)	3 (11%)
Total		39 (37%	66 (63%)

We also found that certain beauty ideal related to typical body size: below average. To be precise, all of characters with Classic/feminine, Trendy, or Athletic beauty ideal have below average body size.

Only for the Girl next door beauty ideal that 11% of them have average body size and 89% have below average body size (see Table 4 below).

Table 4. Beauty Ideal and Body Size

| | | Body size | |
		Below average f (%)	Average f (%)
Beauty ideal	Classic/feminine	34 (100%)	0 (0%)
	Trendy	60 (100%)	0 (0%)
	Athletic	3 (100%)	0 (0%)
	The girl next door	25 (89%)	3 (11%)
Total		122 (98%)	3 (2%)

DISCUSSION

The aims of this study were to explore how the concept of ideal body image was projected by the characters in the teenagers' television drama programs and how gender influenced the concept of body image. This study found that the social age distribution among male actors is more vary than female actors; although most of the characters were teenagers 15-18 years old. This finding shows that female actors have very limited social age: either you must be young to play as children in the family or you must be "old enough" to play as their parents. Male actors have more "options" in the life span.

We also found none preteen representation among female and male actors in the teenagers' television drama series. The absence of the group that, according to Britney Spears, "not a girl, not yet a women," might indicate that the commercial television stations did not see this group as a potential consumer group, unlike children whose families tend to spend money on them, or teenagers who have their own pocket money. When we asked one person who has worked for years in production research and development of one national commercial station, he explained to us that television production teams found it difficult to create stories for preteen audiences: they are too young for

love stories, but too old for children's stories (personal communication with PRA, 24 June 2012).

Different "treatment" in television production for males and females is showed by the comparison actual age and social age of the characters, as well as the body size of the characters. This study shows that only half of female actors have about the similar age between actual and social age, they acted accordingly to their actual age. For male actors, almost all of them have social age accordingly their actual age. As to body size, almost all of the female characters have below average of body size while only half of male characters who have below average of body size. Northup & Liebler (2010) in their content analysis on Nickelodeon and Disney tweens' series also found that most of teenage characters in the series were below average in weight. They pointed out possibility of problem that teenage audiences were more likely to make comparison to the teenage characters in the series, comparing themselves with below average "model" in the series.

Teenagers' television drama series also give a "skewed" picture of ethnicity proportion in Indonesia. the Eastern Indonesian were underrepresented in the programs. The uneven distribution of the real population in Indonesia, with only 13% of the population living in the eastern part

of Indonesian's archipelago might give explanation to this finding. Moreover, the uneven distribution of economic power in Indonesia influences the fact that Western Indonesian were showed more, because the circulation of money has always been much higher in that part of Indonesia, where most of advertising aimed to. One can argue that the number of characters that represented East Asian or Caucasian did not have anything to do with uneven economic power in Indonesia. However, business consideration was involved in the decision to present those ethnicities in the programs: imitating the already-very-popular television programs from Korea, Japan, Taiwan, US, or India. Thus, economic factor is always involved in every decision that was made by television stations.

There are typical features for female characters in the teenagers' television drama series: long hair, fashionable, smart, kind. Most of (young) female characters are portrayed as someone *Trendy,* followed by *Classic Beauty/feminine,* then *the girl next door.* This order is exactly the same with what Northup & Liebler (2010) found. Television series keep reinforcing beauty ideal ideas that a young girl should care a lot about their appearance, very feminine, or well liked. There is no room for "brainy" girls or other type of girls. To conclude, teenagers' television drama programs have presented a certain body image and beauty

ideal for their young audiences, especially girls.

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